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For MY LONDON PEOPLE

WITH LOVE FROM

MAY 1940

I am so glad to hear of you

and
love

TO
JOSEPH AND MARGARET ARMFIELD

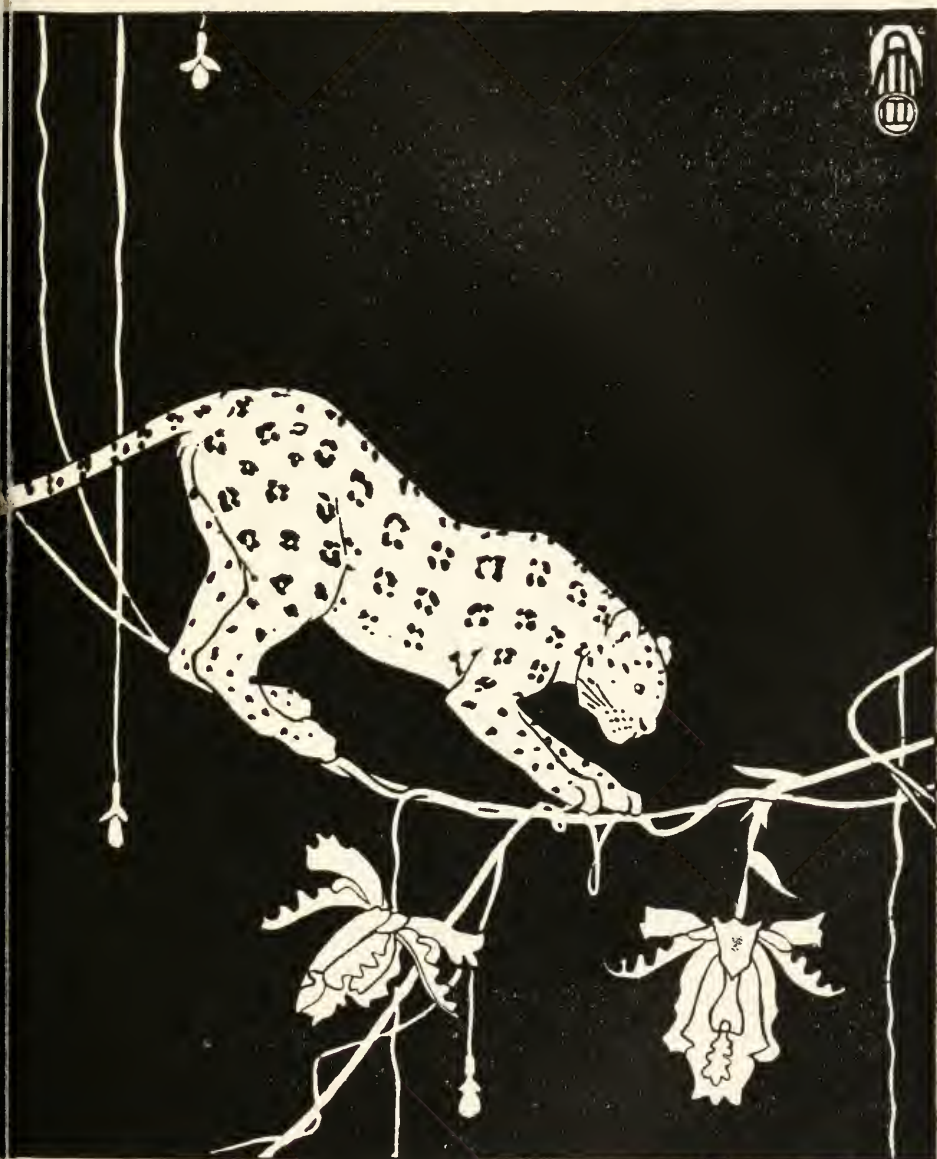
WHO EARLY TAUGHT ME
THE USE OF TOOLS AND
THE LOVE OF BEAUTY
WHICH ARE THE FIRST
NECESSITIES OF THE
CRAFTSMAN ❧ ❧ ❧

"And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also."—Genesis, 1:16.

"For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood: but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.—Isaiah, 9.

"All great art is praise."—John Ruskin.

"The primeval state of man was wisdom, art, science."—William Blake.



THE SYNTAX OF ART

BOOK
FOUR

RHYTHMIC SHAPE

A TEXT-BOOK OF
DESIGN

BY
MAXWELL ARMFIELD



BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA
1920

Printed by
The Press of The Courier
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C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
ANNOUNCEMENT - - - - -	19

PART I

RULES - - - - -	21
ORDER - - - - -	23
SYMBOLISM - - - - -	26
ELEMENTS - - - - -	28
THE THREEFOLD RULE - - - - -	30
REPETITION - - - - -	31
CENTRALIZATION - - - - -	37
SYMMETRY - - - - -	42

PART II

A NOTE ON SYMBOLISM - - - - -	52
A NOTE ON DISTORTION - - - - -	60
ADVERTISEMENT - - - - -	63

T A B L E O F P L A T E S

	PAGE
FRONTISPIECE	
“THE LEOPARD LEAPS”	
PLATE I—REPETITION - - - -	4
PLATE II—CENTRALIZATION - -	39
PLATE III—SYMMETRY - - - -	44
PLATE III—CONTINUED - - - -	47

ANNOUNCEMENT

This little book is fourth of a series schemed to provide a simple basis for composition in any branch of symbolic art-language.

It is becoming obvious that there is no fundamental difference in procedure between the various crafts, such as painting and music, and yet, although Whistler may have given musical titles to his pictures, this was more in the nature of a sentimental stimulus than a contribution to scientific syntax. During the past ten years I have become conscious of relations in this direction which have formed themselves into a fairly comprehensive scheme of grammar. Apart from the difficulty of nomenclature, especially of avoiding the use of terms which now have little or no real meaning, such as "Tone" for instance, these relations have been perceived without effort and are extremely simple, even obvious, one would think. The fact is, however, that so far as I know they have not been perceived and understood in this order previously.

Although so simple and elementary, this book covers the whole ground as far as it goes, including the only possible ways of combining parts in a composition; from a chess-board to a picture by Cezanne, and from an Amerind gesture-song to a Debussy prelude. The terms used are those of the graphic arts in this case, but these can be translated into those of any other method.

This structural basis is of course only one very small part of the grammar of art; the other parts will be considered in other books.—M. A., Berkeley, Calif., August, 1919.

RULES

In one way designing is rather like Mathematics, indeed its base is the same.

There are the same laws underlying the two things.

Some people seem to be able to manipulate figures by instinct, without the use of rules consciously applied, and some people design in the same way too, and it is no doubt the right way. The fact remains, however, that the rules are there, and most people need to know them before they can regain their normal ability to compose lines and spaces intelligently without their aid.

In mathematics you know that if you want to add it is no use applying the rule of multiplication, and it is just the same in designing. If you want a certain result there are certain ways of getting it which you can find out and apply. Even quite distinguished painters often make failures because they do not take the trouble to find out simple rules of cause and effect.

These rules as we say are simple, and any one can learn them. That does not mean that all art is simple or that a good designer can be produced in six lessons or by merely reading a book. The ability may be latent in every one, but it needs thought and practice to be brought to perfection; and a great deal of it. It is a question whether anything is lost by learning rules, and there is no question that a great deal of confidence and directness is gained.

Some people start talking about "self-expression" directly law is mentioned, in fear lest you wish to make them auto-

S E L F E X P R E S S I O N

mata. In a certain sense it is true that the stars are mechanical and automatic in their movement, and that the leaves on a tree are mechanically arranged; that is, they obey certain apparent laws. These facts, however, do not give an automatic impression to the night sky, nor prevent leaves from rustling in the wind. If more attention were paid to the kind of "self" that was expressed and less to expressing it we might all be gainers in the long run. It has been proved to the author that students who understand the more abstract rules of design turn out much more interesting work than those who rely on "inspiration" entirely. One reason is that in the first case the student is not so much intent on expressing himself as on solving a definite problem, and his whole talent is left free for this instead of being diffused over a wide area of vague interests. It is also true that what usually passes for inspiration is little more than haphazard suggestion. True inspiration is as happily concerned with the symbolic meaning of a triangle as of a tree.



ORDER

The first fundamental is Order, of which Pope says that it is "Heaven's first law." Which is only a concise way of saying that no harmonious state of things can exist without that basic quality. Blake also has an incisive word to say on the subject:—

"In eternity one thing never changes into another thing. Each identity is eternal."

To be satisfactory any design must have unity and harmony, the result of order. It must be orderly in its arrangement. If the various parts of a design are fighting together for the mastery the result is just as distracting as a world in which people are fighting together. In some ways the word "Compose" is better than "Design." It means to put parts together.

Composition includes two ways of dealing with parts, though perhaps it is not quite correct to use it for both, Analysis and Synthesis. Any design, or rather any decorated object (for a design should not be thought of apart from its use), consists of at least two parts: the Field, or object to be decorated, and the "something more" which we call Design, or decoration. These two may be one, but at the same time they are always two. In one sense, in good work the two are always one; in another sense, decoration may sometimes be applied separately.

Where the workmanship is one with the decoration we have the simplest unity. In any case it is obvious that the Field, or object, may be Composed of parts, or, Divided into parts.

M A T E R I A L

By "part" is meant the smallest separate unit in a pattern. The Part is always an individual idea which is merely symbolized by some arrangement of the material used as a medium of language.

This material may or may not be the same as that of which the Field or object is composed. Thus, if the foundation in one case were a paper cover to a book, the decoration might be made of colored paper pasted on, or of Graphite rub-in as a pencil, or by Indian ink put on with a pen, or color with a brush.

THE ACTUAL MATERIAL USED IS UNIMPORTANT, but once decided upon THE USE MADE OF IT IS ALL-IMPORTANT.

The particular character of the material must be allowed to govern the whole method of procedure, and should always control the type of composition used. This sounds as if the most material aspect of the problem were allowed to govern the higher mental aspect, but it is not so in reality. Actually the difference between paper and linen is a mental difference and their varied texture is due to the purpose entertained by their manufacturer. To embroider paper, therefore or to try and draw upon linen with a pencil or with clotted paint and a pen, is evidence merely of one's own lack of the sense of fitness. It ruptures the harmony and unity of the design at the outset by setting up a conflict between the field and the decoration.

To conclude, let us repeat, that as the purpose of a design is to tell a story or at least to make some definite effect upon the beholder, it is necessary that the Field and its Parts, the object and decoration, be unified and that the parts be ar-

M A T E R I A L

ranged in an orderly way or they will not be telling a clear story or making a united effect. They may and probably will be trying to tell two stories at once, or the one story will be blurred and out of joint. Some sort of rule then is necessary, until spontaneous obedience to fundamental law is assured.



SYMBOLISM

The next important Fundamental is that ALL ART IS SYMBOLIC, and various ways and means are used. (I) Abstractly: for the purpose of translating the original idea into a language which every one can understand. (II) Concretely: when the phenomena of nature are employed as symbols for the additional purpose of redeeming this object by its use as symbol. See note on Symbolism.

The medium used, the craft employed, make no difference to this.

Mathematics uses one language of Symbolism, Number; Oral and Written word—language is another, better perhaps called simply, The Word, and the language of Art is the third. Each language is symbolic. This means that the visible or audible sign is merely standing for some idea, and that it does not pretend to be that idea. This is obvious in the case of a word, "house" let us say, but it is not so obvious when we see a visual representation of a house; yet it is more important to realize the fact in the latter case than in the former for this very reason.

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

What is usually called Design, as applied to graphic crafts, consists of two divisions, using either different materials of varying darkness and lightness—known as “Black and White” work—or using hues in some concrete form. In the one case your scale of notes, so to speak, is what the Japanese call NOTAN, or Light-Dark, in the other it is Hue ranging from those of earth to the spectrum scale as we see it in the Rainbow, and which we call COLOR. These scales correspond in use to those of sound used for musical expression, and just as you use or could use merely instruments of Percussion in musical composition, so you can compose in visual design merely with instruments of Notan. That is to say, you can merely VARY YOUR MATERIAL ON ONE NOTE.

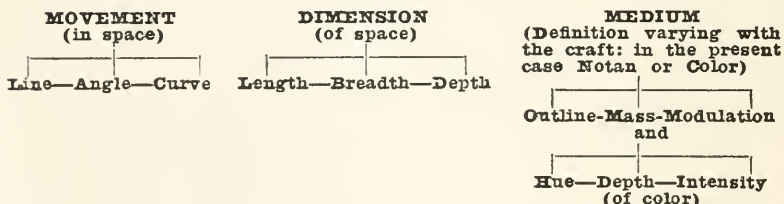
It is easily seen that music is made by the arrangement of different bits of sound on a background of silence, so in visual composition the effect is gained by the arrangement of different bits of sight or visibility upon a background of invisibility or void. In practice we cannot have an actual void except in the case of a darkened room seen from a lighted one, but the analogy will serve. We have then a theoretically invisible surface or space rather, defined in extent, and our set of tools, either white graded to black or hues from deep red to violet. The intelligent and orderly arrangement of these constitutes our language. They are in fact the Elements, or some of them, from which our design is evolved.

O U R T O O L C H E S T

ELEMENTS

Before going any further let us be quite clear as to what exactly we are working with. The Complete range of our tool-chest as it were. Our Elements then, besides the ones we have mentioned, consist of two characteristics: one range has to do with movement, and the other with dimension; so that we have three distinct ranges altogether. Thus:—

THE ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION ARE THREE IN
GENERAL TYPE AND NINE IN SPECIFIC
CHARACTER



These cover the whole range of the tool-chest as regards elements: stated for space-crafts.

In the present book we shall deal with Movement only.

MOVEMENT

Movement in the Graphic Crafts is represented in various ways. It is not actual but implied. Movement includes, as we use the word, the stillness of perfect balance as well as the actual movement of centrifugal and centripetal forces, etc.

Movement is what gives shape, identity and order to parts and to wholes.

Movement is the Purpose made visible.

The Shape of anything is the movement or rhythm of its character. That the shape of anything is the direct result of the purpose in mind in its functioning is easily seen in the case of a simple man-made object such as a boat. The shape of a boat is evolved according to the conditions with which the purpose of getting across a pond or river has to cope with in order to achieve a harmonious result. The varying combinations of right lines, angles and curves give simple shape or identity to whatever medium we take in hand as our symbolic language.

A complete shape or symbol, the expression of purpose, is taken as a part, and it is the combination of these parts or shapes in a given space which constitutes the process of design. It is seen then that the Parts are in reality themselves the elements of a larger whole which is the complete design. The same rules which govern the formation of shapes or parts also govern the complete composition, for each part is actually a microcosm, a miniature composition in itself.

THE THREEFOLD RULE OF UNITY

Governing the Unification of Parts of Anything

All design is governed by simple rules which are threefold.

The first “fold” of the rule is fundamental, and states the covering fact or problem.

The second deals with varied specific aspects and is in the nature of infinite unfoldment and amplification of the first, by analysis.

The third is relative in its nature, completing the rule and showing the way on to its unfoldment into something quite different—though in the same sphere of action; by synthesis.

In Symbolic Composition each rule is included in the subsequent rules.

The first is the rule of REPETITION, or Parallel relation.

The second is the rule of CENTRALIZATION.

The third is the rule of SYMMETRY, or proportional relation.

RULE OF REPETITION

This rule is the basis of all Composition whatever. Before it was invented (discovered) all attempts at graphic language were necessarily chaotic. Other aspects of the problem were highly developed; the ability to represent for instance, but there was no coherence or unity in the whole. In art all activity is REGULAR, i.e. conforming to rule, however obscure it may be.

If you repeat anything over and over again in a regular way it will give some sense of satisfaction, especially if your aim is to cover a book or make a border to go round a table-cloth, where it is more important to have some gay color than to be reminded of anything particular.

There are a number of ways of repeating shapes, however. The shapes themselves differentiate some and others are evolved mathematically.

The shapes used here as examples will be all the simplest kind, and these are chosen not only because the rule is seen more clearly in this way but also because they are the most beautiful in this connection.

As shapes become complex and freighted with meaning, it is distressing to see them merely repeated; one demands variety in a complex idea. There can be infinite variety as we shall see, in repetition, but it is the variety of arrangement that should be brought out, not that of the parts arranged, to so great an extent. In the highest "fold" of the rule we shall find that the shapes can be varied with more freedom than in the lower ones.

CONTIGUOUS REPETITION

This implies that the parts touch one another. The simplest shapes such as the square, hexagon, etc., can be repeated in this way as a basis for more complex amplifications or as a simple pattern in itself. In defining a design, the basic rule should characterize it, although much more complex rules may be used afterwards to unfold the idea further.

In Fig. 1 is shown a contiguous pattern made by the regular repetition of squares in two methods. First the repetition of the parts in one direction only—forming what is called a border—and then in all directions forming the basis of the Allover pattern.

(It is useful to begin with the use of squared paper for these simple problems as it saves much time and ruling and accustoms one to accuracy of proportion. Never rule lines in a design if it can be avoided, draw as well as possible over the blue printed line.)

Repeat an equilateral triangle in these two ways.

You will see that the results are much more varied and different in effect from those obtained from the square. This is because it is a more complex shape. Each of the possible ways of repeating a triangle has a rather different effect, because the eye does not follow lines of direction as readily in all cases.

Repeat a circle in the same ways.

Here we find that a change has come into our work. The circle does not touch its neighbor all round, but leaves spaces between. These may be considered as parts of a different shape, or as voids, or as bits of background, but at any rate they introduce a new set of problems.

We have here the idea of ALTERNATION, in this example.

A L T E R A T I O N

ALTERNATION OF SHAPE

The pattern may still be called contiguous in its nature, because the parts do touch each other regularly, so that Alternation comes under the rule of repetition; indeed it depends on the rule: it may be called varied repetition, perhaps.

The next way in which alternation may be used is

ALTERNATION OF POSITION

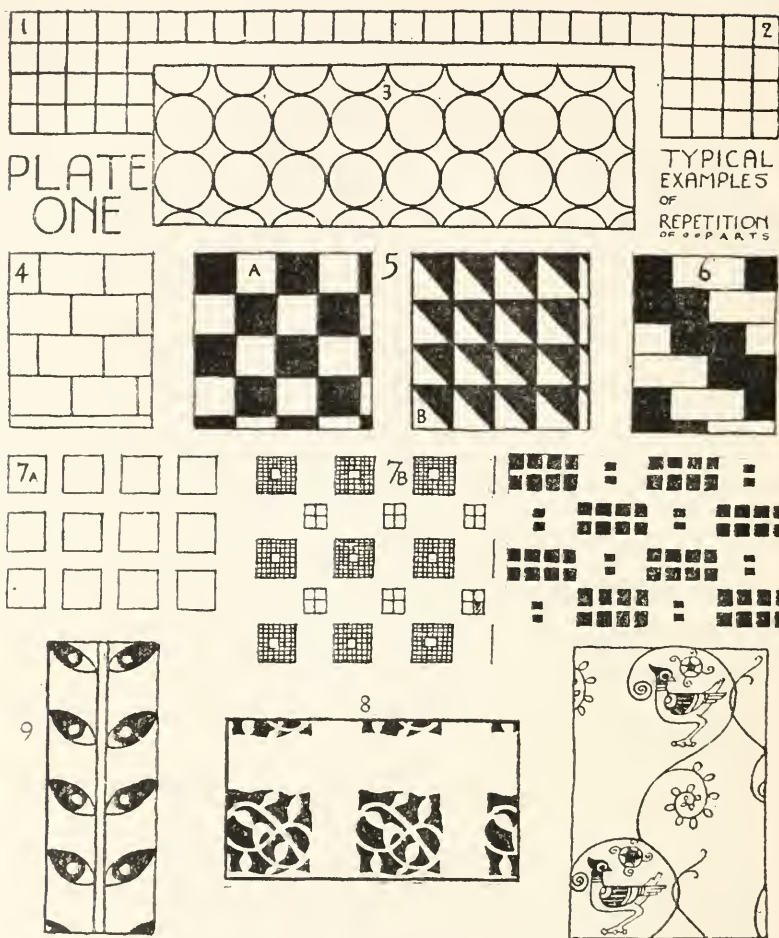
This is shown in Fig. 4 and is a very useful method of varying a design that might otherwise be uninteresting or spotty.

The Part or Parts are placed otherwise than immediately next to each other, in the alternate bands of the design. The relative position of the two parts may be varied infinitely and need not necessarily move half way as in the usual method of setting brickwork, for instance.

The final method of variation is

ALTERNATION OF COLOR (OR NOTAN)

Where shapes are alternate, unless the shape is very different, the second part is usually alternated in color also. The reason of this is that, at a distance, it is possible that the two shapes, being contiguous might be confused or blurred. The designer has to make the variation obvious at a glance. Fig. 5, a. and b. Notice that 6 would not be satisfactory merely in line: nor would Fig. 4 be the same design at all if treated as 5b (Fig. 6).



A N A L Y S I S

PROPORTIONAL REPETITION

Proportion relates parts as to Quantity: [size and number.]

Hitherto we have been dealing with such parts as have touched each other at some point or points, but parts may be repeated on a background or in space without touching. In this case the rule of Proportion is the controlling element, keeping them still in order and unity. Whereas Alternation deals only with two different parts or relations, proportion unifies any number more than two. (Fig. 7, etc.)

Shape and Color will of course receive the wider latitude implied in the freer arrangement and relative position.

As repeating patterns become more complex, it is usual in good work to find the parts uneven when they appear to be repeated. This is to give the assurance of infinite variety of individual expression: but it will never be found to interfere with or obscure the fundamental purpose of the design as a whole, and is as a rule only unconsciously seen by the ordinary beholder. This uneven quality increases with the complexity of the design. A simple chequer, for instance is not usually interfered with unless the craft used is mechanical in its method, for normally the slight unevenness in the material would be sufficient to give the sense of variety.

The invariable characteristic of Repeating pattern is that it has no reference to the size or shape of the field, or object decorated, it can be dealt with by the foot, yard or square mile, and so long as it is simple in character, may even be used over complex superficies such as mouldings.

It may be said to correspond to the basic idea of Government, in which as in very simple tribes, the authority is

A N A L Y S I S

vested in public opinion translated into laws which govern the unit.

Its character is symbolized by the various expressions of Parallelism such as the Rectangle, upon which all repeating patterns are based.



RULE OF CENTRALIZATION

So far we have been considering only such arrangement as called for continuity either in border or all-over pattern; designs you could chop off by the foot without affecting their character. These designs resemble such natural arrangements as a bed of crystals or a honeycomb. The parts of them adhere to one another, but they do not in any way help one another except by this united hanging together, nor are they related in any way to the shape or extent of the Field.

We are now to consider the type of arrangement in which all the parts not only hang together, but actively help one another in being in some way complimentary, and in which they are individual in character. In the case of Repetition one might say that the parts repeated simply by multiplying themselves indefinitely and spreading out and out as very primitive tribes do. The rule of Centralization shows us designs in which there is a central important part or point about which the other individual parts are grouped much as in the old days Lords and Commoners were grouped about a King, or children about parents, and so on, in communities and families. The analogy is not perfect, for in good design there is no element of autocracy or restriction. Law is obeyed because it is the law itself which shows the individuality of the work. The complete unit formed in this way about a center, fills the field evenly and does not stray outside it. Every detail of its composition conforms and refers to the centralizing movement. A Centralized design moves from a common center to a defined circumference, and if the type shape of the repeating pattern is the square, that of the centralized pattern is the circle. Care should be taken not to confuse a centralized pattern with a repeating pattern in

V A R I E T Y I N U N I T Y

which a centralized unit is used as a shape to be repeated. Fig. 8, Plate 1.

A Centralized design may make its own Circumference or fill a given Field.

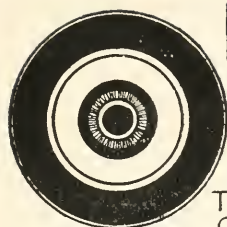
In the first case it need not necessarily be a simple shape so long as it has a recognizable and logical proportion.

NO part of a Centralized design can be omitted without injuring the scheme of the whole. In Fig. 2, Plate 2, omit A, B, or C and the design is ruined and incomplete. The reason for this is that the design is built up on the individual relationship of each part to the central unity, and thus to each other part, and whilst each part may be repeated about a common center yet it is also related to each other in different directions. Therefore the individual character or "local color" of each part is all-important.

The arrangement of the Solar System is a good illustration in nature of this type of unity.

Centralization emphasizes the idea of individual character, and variety in unity. It involves movement and balance about a central point, the movement like the parts, complete within the design.

PLATE TWO



TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF
CONCENTRIC MOVEMENT

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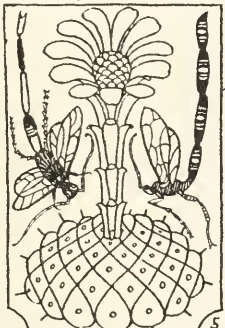


RADIAL

CENTRAL AND

AXIAL MOVEMENT

6



5

AXIAL MOVEMENT AND

7



ARRANGEMENT ABOUT A CENTER

1. CONCENTRIC ARRANGEMENT

Concentric arrangement corresponds to contiguous repetition: it is the simple enlargement or reduction of the shape from or to a center: within or without itself. (Fig. 1.)

The design of this kind may of course be varied exactly as was the repeating pattern, by changing the shapes of the parts, their relative position or their color, but they always have a common center.

2. RADIAL ARRANGEMENT

Radial arrangement is the movement of parts about and from a central focus. The parts themselves have not all a common center necessarily, but are connected with one in the movement of the design. They need not be arranged in a circle; a cross, for instance, is radial in arrangement, but they must refer to a common base. Fig. 2.

The design is determined by the variety of the lines and shapes used and in their arrangement. A shape, for instance, may be used as a radius to connect another part with the center, and so on.

Then the parts may be connected at unequal but proportional intervals from the center. Fig. 3.

In some designs there may be two or more centers or foci, but in this case they must be themselves connected logically, or the result is merely a repeating pattern. Fig. 4.

INFINITE INDICATIONS

AXIAL ARRANGEMENT

In the arrangement of parts about a central Axis we see the effect of a progressive center, moving in a line, either straight or curved. The simplest example of such design is one in which the parts on the one side exactly repeat the other side. In more complex arrangements they need not exactly repeat so long as the equipoise is maintained, because with increasing complexity of shape one instinctively feels repelled by absolute similarity. Highly developed entities are invariably individual in proportion to their complexity. This is even true of repeating patterns which are more than contiguous in character. The best examples are always uneven, not because the craftsmen could not make them so but because their instinct was right. The aim of the artist was always to indicate infinity in as many directions as possible, and all forms of technical symbolism are developed with this end in mind. The expedient of broken color for instance, and superimposed layers of different color. This variety of part applies to all centralized design, and some quite complicated pictures are based upon a Radial or Axial arrangement. Fig. 5.

Confusion should be avoided between a centralized axial arrangement and some forms of repeating alternate pattern. The deciding factor is always the completion or otherwise of the design. If a whole unit it is centralized, if not, repeating. Fig. 6.

Centralized design is symbolized by the Circle—center and circumference connected by radii.



RULE OF SYMMETRY

The highest state of unity is that of Symmetrical arrangement. The Greek meaning of Symmetry is to measure together. Webster has, "The conformity of all parts to a certain measure." The Anglo-Saxon root of "measure" is "to meet," "to come to," "reaching to," so we see that the idea is a common agreement among parts to follow a certain line of procedure towards a proposed end: thus united in a common aim or purpose although different in their individual characters.

It is usual to speak of Centralized designs as Symmetrical, and indeed a repeating pattern is symmetrical as far as that goes. I have chosen to use the word to characterize the highest state of Symmetry because other words more definitely applied to the other states and there was no word which seemed to cover the last division of the subject so well.

We may then take it that our use of the word implies the common aim of a number of parts when that aim is neither mere cohesion nor mere centralization. That is to say when the parts are merely united by Proportion and relative connection.

The purpose here is not, as in Centralized arrangement, to form a single complete whole with a definite bound and character, but to show that unity is infinite in its nature, and that wherever one may choose to stay, the purpose of the whole may be completely implied and seen. In such a state of unity the minutest fragment of a movement is seen to imply a universal relation and infinite progression along the same line. If we think of the centralized design as similar or corresponding to the government of kingship, the symmet-

F R E E M O V E M E N T

rical corresponds to an ideal Republic in which government is vested neither in public opinion nor centralized authority, but in the universal obedience to and understanding of Principle, as expressed in perfect Law. In its relation to Law each part finds its right relation to every other, thus carrying the idea of centralization to its completion in Universality. Law means, in symmetrical arrangement, the proportional disposition in every consideration which will best express the purpose of the whole. In centralized design the individual was the governing idea; here it is the inter-relating common purpose which moulds the individual part and governs its varying attitude in different relations. Symmetrical design therefore is often expressed symbolically by the forces which hold things together. Space is no longer thought of as a piece of shape, or background, but is the arena in which relations are indicated, and in which forces are shown in action.

The parts are therefore no longer arranged about a center or axis, but in relative proportion to each other and the bound of the Field (which becomes of importance here). They move in defined modes that are continuous forever in either direction, but completely implied within the Field covered, by means of constant proportion.

Movement in art has no meaning apart from stillness, and just as the center represented this stillness in centralized design, so, in the symmetrical arrangement, the limit of the field, the edge of the panel or object, stands for this idea of stationery strength and permanence.

The shape, position, and movement of parts in the space are therefore related to the boundary line of the design; as well as to other parts. Thus a square shape placed in a square shape will not give the same effect as if placed in a circle.

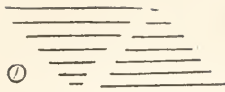
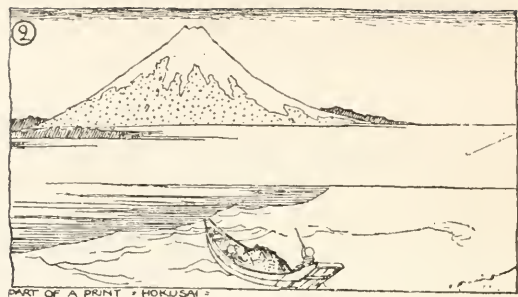
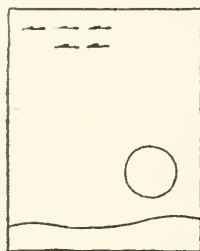


PLATE THREE

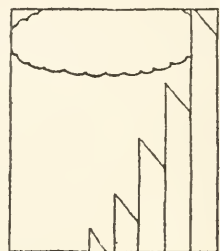
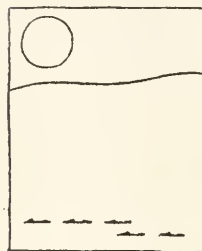
EXAMPLES OF SYMMETRICAL ARRANGEMENT



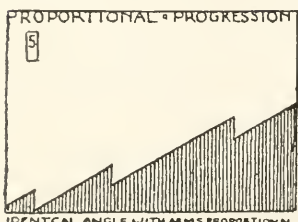
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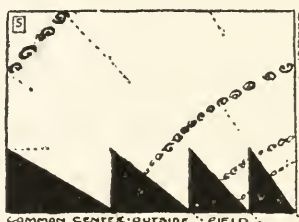
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IDENTICAL ANGLE WITH ARMS PROPORTIONAL



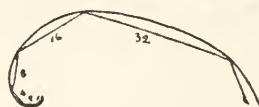
COMMON CENTER OUTSIDE FIELD



CENTRALISED MOTIVE SYMMETRICALLY PLACED



5A



INFINITE CURVES IN WHICH ANY PORTION IS THE SAME IN CHARACTER AS ANY OTHER

COMMON AIM EXPRESSED

The lines in Fig. 1, Plate III, are arranged symmetrically. They are each different (in length) yet they all follow a common proportion in their relative positions to each other. This arrangement is known technically as Serial symmetry. In Fig. 4 a similar arrangement is shown in which the whole is implied in a small portion.

The Common aim in a design may be expressed in various ways.

1st. RELATIVE SHAPE OF PARTS. Fig. 2, Plate III

The shape of parts is considered in relation to other parts and to the Field with reference to the common aim. In Turner's pictures for instance his shapes are frequently modified to a great extent in reference to his shape-symbolism, carried through the picture. A well-known instance in his "Falls of Schaffhausen" analyzed at length by Ruskin in "Modern Painters."

2nd. RELATIVE POSITION OF PARTS. Fig. 3

The relative position of parts is considered also with reference to one another and to the field, in bringing out the common aim. The same shapes may be used in different relative positions with quite different results.

3rd. PROPORTIONAL MOVEMENT. Figs. 5 and 5a

The Movement in Symmetrical design is not relative to the character of the parts as in Centralized arrangement. It is a common motion which gathers up all the parts in its sweep and uses them to accentuate its character and directions. It is frequently expressed in the representation of forces, such as wind, gravitation, etc., and is not confined to

P R O P O R T I O N

the boundary of the field, but carries the eye outside it. The space occupied by the actual composition, however small, indicates the nature of the unifying movement and its infinite character: infinite in the sense of never being completed though it is completely understood in its smallest fragment.

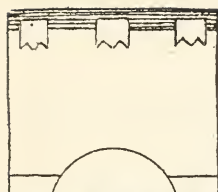
Referring for a moment to the question of stillness, lines parallel to the boundary of the field give a sense of stability, stillness and permanence, whatever shape the field may happen to be. Fig. 6.

Proportional movement as indicated by angle may be seen by repeating an upright line along a horizontal at intervals of equal proportion; e.g. 3.6.9., etc., and connecting the apex of one with the base of the next. Fig. 5a.

Proportional curves may be made by raising perpendicular lines of proportionate lengths upon a horizontal, and connecting them at the top with a curved line. Such curves, and some spirals are known as "Infinite" curves because theoretically they proceed forever into space in the same proportion, never coming back upon themselves as does the circle, for instance.

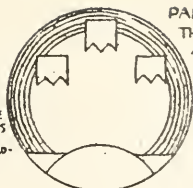
Designs unified by such curves, and by series of infinite progressions such as the spirals, give a sense of space and perpetual movement, however small the part of the curve seen in the design and however minute the design itself may be.

In Fig. 9 is shown a spiral which is used in three different compositions. Notice that a different part of the spiral is used in each case, giving quite a different result. To develop the sense of symmetrically unified parts it is helpful to follow such arrangements in actual fact. Trace the movement of

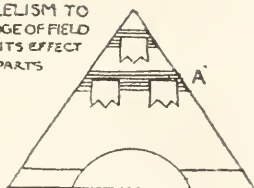


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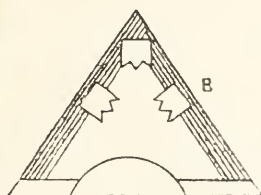
A & B
ARE
ALTERNATE
SOLUTIONS
OF THE
SAME PRO-
BLEM



PARALLELISM TO
THE EDGE OF FIELD
AND ITS EFFECT
ON PARTS



A

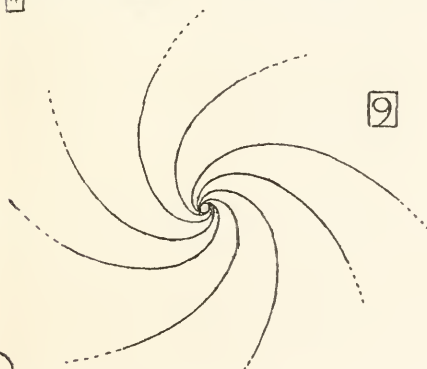


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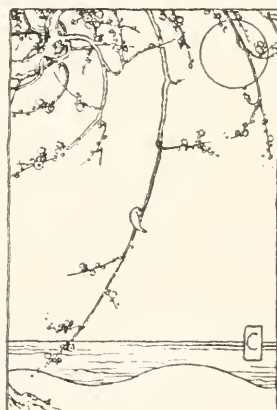
9ABC COMPOSED WITH THE SAME
SPIRAL AS BASIS



B



9



C

PLATE THREE CONTD

MASTERS OF PROPORTION

line in the grain of wood, of erosion or cleavage in rocks, the lines of wind-blown or electrically moved cloud, the outline of mountain crests, etc.

Lionardo, who was perhaps the first to see this mode of unification in European art, spent much time in this kind of study.

The finest masters of Proportional movement, and indeed every form of Symmetrical composition are of course the Chinese painters of the early periods, and the best of the Japanese. From the very beginning they adopted this method, and their infrequent excursions into repeating or centralized patterns are as a rule uninteresting when not positively bad: they seem to be made by rote without that delicate variability which gives more Western designs their charm. This tendency towards the freer type of composition which is also very noticeable in the Greek, Latin and French types of work, is usually coupled with a curious inability to produce fine craftsmanship in the lower orders of work.

The Greek ornament is atrocious from a designer's point of view, as lifeless as the preceding Mycenaean patterns were vital. The same may be said of the French, who never could design a simple pattern that was not flamboyant or frigid and dead. On the other hand, the Gothic and Scandinavian designers and craftsmen never freed themselves from the centralized basis. It remains for us to unify our work by using the whole range of possible types of work.

In conclusion it may be well to say that the habit of thinking of a picture or wall decoration as in some way different from a fan or a coal-box and requiring some mysteriously greater knowledge of art to produce, must go. The same laws apply in each case.

O U T W A R D E V E R Y W A Y

Referring to our table of Elements, we shall find that the advanced type of work will use the more advanced means, such as proportional intensity of color, and modulation, whereas the simpler crafts will in the nature of the material used, restrict themselves to questions of simple line, and elementary variations of Hue.

It must be emphasized that the higher rule includes the lower without superseding it. Repetition is implicit in Symmetry, and centralization is merely an unfoldment of repetition which itself leads on to symmetrical arrangements. This fact is not seen by those who imagine that we have outgrown the work accomplished by men in the past. In a very few respects this is the case, where superstition has been allowed to dominate the work, but, considering the conditions it seems almost miraculous that art products maintain their "modernity" over periods of thousands of years. It IS miraculous; such things are a "sign" that the artist has glimpsed something of eternity, which is necessarily outside of time or space, and has been able, in time and space, to translate that glimpse into a language which is universally legible.

Its shape-symbol is the expanding spiral, moving continuously outward every way.

ANALYSIS OF SYMMETRICAL ARRANGEMENT

RELATIVE SHAPE	RELATIVE POSITION	PROPORTIONAL MOVEMENT
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Note.—This vast subject of Symmetry, corresponding to the formation of chords, or Harmony in music, is merely touched upon here. The student will find much help in the fourth and fifth vols. of "Modern Painters" by John Ruskin, and from a study of "Dynamic Symmetry" as rediscovered by Mr. Jay Hambidge (Yale U. Press and "The Diagonal")

D Y N A M I C S Y M M E T R Y

magazine). This study is still in its infancy and is an avenue of enormous importance in the symbolic renaissance of the immediate future. It will be noticed that Mr. Hambidge lays especial stress on areas, whereas the symmetry of line has mostly been mentioned in this book. The subject of areas properly comes under consideration specifically in the part of artistic syntax covered by the next volume (5) concerned with Form.



PART II

A NOTE ON SYMBOLISM

Whilst this book is not immediately concerned with the symbolic side of the subject, it is at the same time impossible to study design intelligently without an understanding of the simpler aspects of it.

O F T H E B I B L E

We find ourselves at a point of outlook in some ways similar to the position of the artist at the time of the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy: at a time when the very sophisticated art of the period is out of touch with the people as a whole and has entirely lost sight of that vital symbolic basis which alone gives to art-expression its immortal character and its universal appeal. To say that the symbolic is popular may sound absurd, but that is only because one has grown accustomed to hear the word applied to mysterious or vague modes of thought which have no right to the name. It is because of this that the study of Biblical symbolism is so important. The Bible is unique in that it is essentially the Book of the People. It is pre-eminently a monument of democratic art come out of periods that were not politically free. The parables of Jesus as well as the Psalms of David are perfect models of the symbolic art-form, being true and beautiful to the simplest mind as well as to those who see more deeply into the meaning.

The story of the Prodigal Son is neither mysterious nor occult, yet it is inherently symbolic, and consequently will unfold in any direction as far as the understanding of the hearer can follow. The Bible is full of such art, and no better study could be found for the foundation of modern art. * * * *

The period now drawing to a close has been one of chaos and disorder almost exactly analogous to the break-up of the Roman empire, in which license has paraded unashamed and has poisoned the popular mind with every kind of unclean temptation. This reaction from a state of restrictive law must be followed by an awakening to the true joy of life which neither Bacchanalia nor Oriental orgies of a more refined nature can give.

DICTIONARY MEANING

After a diet of highly spiced dishes the palette finds the natural food of clean fruit and bread unappetizing, and the sunshine is merely painful to the woman who comes out into it from a dimly lit afternoon card party. A similar effect is produced at a period of renaissance by the vitality of a fresh statement of truth. It seems uninteresting, crude or weak, and to have little relation with life. It is, however, the so-called "life" that needs overhauling: symbolism is consistent in every period, because it does not change, being eternally true.

The dictionary meaning of the word implies that a symbol is one thing **STANDING FOR** another. This covers only a part of the ground. It would cover the sun being used as a symbol for the Creative Mind for instance.

As a sub-meaning we find that a symbol is a "visible sign or representation of an idea or quality of another object by reason of natural aptness, of association or of convention."

This can be illustrated in the case of the European Holly-symbol and its interesting development.

Natural Aptness:—Resemblance to the Crown of Thorns and spots of blood?

Association:—Use of it in Christmas decorations made it synonymous with that festival.

Convention:—Repeated use in this way for centuries has converted it into the Red and Green symbol used in the United States at Christmas time irrespective of the original holly, and often quite otherwise, than symbolically, it having become a mere convention with scarcely a trace of symbolic meaning.

V A R I O U S S T A G E S

If we take the subject of Symbolic method in its three main divisions, we find that in the FIRST STAGE:—

The symbol and idea symbolized are inseparable. The object seen is not separate from the idea in the mind of the beholder: idea and expression are one. This faculty has been hidden so long that it seems lost, but the early symbolism of the Bible should be seen in this way, for instance:—

“So he drove out the man; and he placed at the East of the garden of Eden, * * * a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”

This passage from Genesis is both fact and symbol when the root meaning of the words is gained.

IN STAGE TWO:—

The eye or ear perceives a concrete object which reminds the beholder of an abstract fact, as,

“As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so longeth my soul for Thee O God.”

The danger of this method, especially in visual arts, is to become so interested in the Hart that the Soul gets forgotten.

IN STAGE THREE:—

The symbolism is entirely invisible and submerged. A piece of history, as an example, is worked out in such a way as to show the inevitable result of certain actions, and a parallel indicated, as for instance the showing that the history of the Jews from the Exodus is also that of every individual after his perception of the fact of his slavery to materiality.

D O U B L E M E A N I N G

Another example might be the showing in the drawing of a wind-moulded tree that the vital fact was not destroyed by conditions of nature, but that the meeting of them brought out qualities of endurance and so on which would not otherwise have been seen.

In every stage the abstract remains unseen and the image seen only as symbol undergoing redemption through the imagination or true vision.

In the case of such universal symbols as Fire, Cloud, the Tree and Serpent, as used in Christian symbolism, it will often be found that the root meaning of the word is the symbolic meaning also, whilst the word may now be used as a rule in a false sense. This causes some of the apparent obscurity of symbolism, and a good dictionary will clear up many mysteries.

It should also be remembered that a true symbol has two meanings at least. Its meaning as a fact and as a temporary falsehood. For instance in the case of Fire, as the Devourer, and as Inspiration the divine food of the Imagination. As devourer it is seen consuming under the figure of purification—as of metals. The fire in this case does not injure anything but the unclean admixture which is hiding the true character of it. It is the same here as the symbol of the Fan, separating the chaff from the wheat. The destroying fire of affliction is the pain serving to rectify consciousness or destroy sin in it, thus causing it to perceive the harmonious condition of things and at the same time itself being perceived as the Revealer, its true character.

From this it will be seen that the method of symbolism is to redeem. The life of Jesus is thus the supreme symbol. Vision perceives the symbol, which is thus brought down into nature, is "made flesh" in order to redeem some specific idea,

T R U T H A N D B E A U T Y

such as fire, tree, etc., by raising it above the earth into its true sphere.

All visual symbols are not necessarily confined to artistic use. Truth as well as beauty is expressed by symbols. Scientific expression is by means of the Abstract Number and Diagram and the Word. These are included in art but other methods are also used.

The Statement of Truth is amplified in the Praise of Beauty.

Praise is a word almost identical in meaning with Art, the roots intertwining about the ideas of strength, rising, and enlarging.

The chief distinction is that Art unfolds or amplifies the statement of Truth, or Understanding; it is the completion of the Triad. Blake, though sometimes falling into obscurity, often has brilliant gleams, and one of them is:—

“Poetry fettered, fetters the human race. Nations are destroyed or flourish in proportion as their poetry, painting and music are destroyed or flourish. The primeval state of man was wisdom, art, science.”

Except that science should precede art to be in correct order, the statement contains more truth than most explanations of a similar kind. He uses “wisdom” here to mean the original perception of some truth which is understood by science and revealed in art.

It remains to warn the reader against several forms of diabolism or perverted symbolism always hanging round the heels of vision to bite them.

P R E V A L E N T E R R O R S

The First is the worship of the Symbol for its own sake.

That is, the worship of the Sun as God, for instance. This is idolatry. It may be seen destroying the art of India, Greece and Mediaeval Europe amongst other manifestations. Image-making of all kinds against which Israel was warned in the commandments. That this does not refer to symbolic art is proved by the fact that Moses immediately ordered a tabernacle to be built, full of "images" or symbols.

The Second is the sin of theft, the attempt to use the method of symbolism for material exposition, or the worship of method without the spirit. This is the unforgiveable sin the letter that "killeth." It is symbolized by the sepulchre or grave, in its final sense, for it becomes an empty shell of formulae, useless and devoid of anything living.

The Third is the sin of adultery, symbolized by Babylon or the Harlot, and is the love of the symbol-incarnate for its own sake. This is seen in the later art of China, India and modern Europe and America. Its expression is what is called Art for Art's sake. Its visual symbol is the spectrum or rainbow—the unmeaning love of pretty colors. A passion for sunsets and iridescence is a danger signal. All these three eventually commit suicide: symbolized by the serpent with its tail in its own mouth: destroying itself in three "days."

The first seals itself into a temple, the second freezes itself into death and the third consumes itself in the fire of eroticism.

E T E R N A L R E D E M P T I O N

It would be difficult in concluding this note, to improve on Blake's summing up of the function of symbolism as redeemer:—

“The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true * * * for the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life, and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt. This will come to pass by an improvement of enjoyment * * * If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man, as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern.”



A NOTE ON DISTORTION

The works of art most notable for their symbolic character are frequently thought to be distorted by those who do not see the symbol clearly. This leads to two regrettable results. The belief gains currency that symbolism is queer and not quite healthy, and this is accentuated by the other, which is, that well-meaning artists imitate these so-called distortions instead of trying to understand them. They fancy that these strangenesses are the result of wilful egotism in the artist, and invent a philosophy to bolster up this perversion in which they maintain that the artist is "above" natural phenomena and can distort them as he pleases if by so doing he can express what he calls "himself."

The apparent distortion of symbolic work arises from exactly the opposite state of mind. The artist's vision is so clear that he sees through the natural fact to its actuality, and perceives it merely as symbol. Seeing more clearly than others the actual facts of the matter, and realizing that these are not concerned with time or space-conditions, he often endeavors to actually show these ideal conditions in time and space, whereas this is impossible; they can only be indicated, presented or represented in symbol.

In so far as these natural facts are used as symbol their character should be respected, for enlightenment comes not by discarding them but by seeing them in a truer light. This is the means by which the symbol disappears and its place is seen to have been always taken by the reality which had not before been visible.

N O T D E S P I S E D

Reality is not, that is to say, a wild void, but a true vision of what we already perceive "darkly."

Nature, then, is not so much the inveterate enemy of art, as the distortion which art corrects through Imagination using nature as symbol.

Those who understand natural facts best are the artists who use them most symbolically and whose work seems most strange and distorted to the uneducated mind. This is inevitable. The proof of the sanity and reality of such work being that it appears "natural" to succeeding generations who grow to perceive its relation to nature. They may or may not perceive its symbolic intent, but unless their learning is purely material, they must gradually do so. It is not until the artist allows the Imagination, or spiritual vision, to control every detail of his work that it can possess that unity of idea which welds every part into the whole and produces what will seem less and less strange as humanity sees more clearly.



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HANGING GARDEN
A VOLUME OF VERSE

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